

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN



MEDIA ADVISORY

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Government Reform to Evaluate Progress in Keeping Drinking Water Safe in D.C.

Lead Regulations, Inter-Agency Coordination Efforts Also To Be Discussed

**What: Government Reform Committee oversight hearing:
“Thirsty for Results: Lessons Learned from the District of Columbia’s Lead
Contamination Experience”**

When: FRIDAY, May 21, 2004, 10:00 a.m.

Where: ROOM 2154, RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

Background:

Continuing its investigation into the lead water contamination in the District of Columbia, the Government Reform Committee will bring together the relevant federal and local agencies to assess what progress has been made in protecting the health of residents served by the D.C. Water and Sewer Authority. This status report will include information about the remediation process, lead pipe replacement and changes in water treatment chemicals.

The Committee will also discuss whether new measures are needed to ensure that regulations governing lead content in the water supply and requirements for coordination among governmental agencies are sufficient to protect the water supply. Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.) has introduced H.R. 4268, an amendment to the Safe Drinking Water Act intended to address issues raised by the unfolding lead water problem in the District of Columbia. The proposed legislation would impose new responsibilities on the EPA and 60,000 water utilities nationwide and authorize \$240 million annually for five years (including \$40 million a year for D.C.) for lead-pipe replacement nationwide.

In the summer of 2003, two-thirds of the 6,118 homes in the District of Columbia that were tested showed lead levels exceeding the federal “action level” limit of 15 parts per billion (ppb). More than 150 homes had lead levels of more than 300 ppb – levels that are rarely seen, according to experts. Homeowners were not informed of the higher levels until months later. Since then, government agencies have supplied water filters to affected residents, performed additional testing of the water at homes, schools and libraries, and conducted blood screenings for children and pregnant and nursing women.

At this hearing, the Committee expects to learn from the EPA, WASA and the Washington Aqueduct (which processes drinking water for D.C. and parts of Northern Virginia) what specific actions they have taken to combat the elevated lead levels and what steps they have taken to guarantee the future safety of the local drinking water.

Among the specific questions the Committee will be asking:

- Was sufficient consideration given to the corrosive effects of chloramines in the District of Columbia water system? Were alternatives, such as the use of zinc orthophosphate, given adequate consideration?
- What factors, other than the introduction of chloramines, may have contributed to the elevated lead levels?
- Were communications between EPA and WASA and between WASA and the general public adequate?
- Did EPA properly specify and did WASA correctly follow water testing protocols to ensure uniformity, accuracy and timeliness in reporting the results?
- Has the governmental response been sufficient to protect the public?

The answers to these questions will inform the Committee on the need for further remedial action in the District and whether proposed changes to the Safe Water Drinking Act are necessary and appropriate.

WITNESSES

The Honorable Benjamin H. Grumbles, Acting Assistant Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency Office of Water

Mr. Donald S. Welch, Regional Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency Region III

Mr. Thomas P. Jacobus, General Manager, Washington Aqueduct, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Mr. Jerry Johnson, General Manager, District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority

Mr. Aaron Colangelo, Natural Resources Defense Council

Mr. Paul Schwartz, Clean Water Action

Mr. Howard Neukrug, Director, Office of Watersheds, Philadelphia Water Department,
on behalf of the American Water Works Association

Mr. Angela Logomasini, Director, Risk and Environmental Policy, Competitive
Enterprise Institute

Mr. Scott Rubin, Attorney- Consultant